

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

A Dual DVM/MD Program Is Established in Montreal, Canada

By Dr. Donald F. Smith
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Veterinarians can now become physicians with just one year of extra study! To emphasize the growing understanding that human and veterinary medicine are complementary and that they are founded upon the same scientific principles, the dean of the Montreal Veterinary College has joined forces with a leading physician who has just returned from a tour in Europe. The two renowned academics also share the same avant-garde philosophy of medical teaching. With the veterinary dean's consent, Canada's foremost physician will initiate a research program in comparative medicine and also develop a joint teaching program for medical and veterinary students.

Under the program, veterinary student instruction in physiology, pathology, chemistry and microscopy will be shared with physicians from the McGill University faculty of Medicine. In these courses, the content will be the same as that for medical students, and the examinations will be identical.

Students who complete the veterinary curriculum in good standing will be able to take one additional year in the McGill medical curriculum and will qualify as physicians as well as veterinarians.¹

As you may have guessed if you read this far, the above report is not contemporary. Rather, it is from the 1880s when novel strategic thinking about the health sciences was more prevalent than today. And this particular initiative was only possible at that time because of the connection between two of the most brilliant and opportunistic medical minds of the late 19th century, and because their veterinary and medical schools were co-located.

The physician of the duo was William Osler, then at McGill (before he went to Philadelphia and from there to Baltimore where he helped establish the Johns Hopkins Hospital). Osler was America's first comparative pathologist. He was so committed to what we now call "One Health" that he even convinced the dean of the Montreal Veterinary College to rename his institution the Faculty of Comparative Medicine.²

The veterinarian is someone whose name few will recognize. Many more people know the reputation of his classmate, Andrew Smith, who also graduated in 1861 from the renowned

Edinburgh Veterinary College and established the Toronto Veterinary College--the highly successful program that was later moved to Guelph. Others will know of Cornell's first veterinary professor, James Law, also a contemporary student from Edinburgh.

But the man with whom Osler felt such a close affinity was Duncan McNab McEachran, the third member of the distinguished veterinary trio from the Edinburgh Veterinary College.



Duncan McNab McEachran

(Photo from Dictionary of Canadian Biography, see reference 1, below)

McEachran was probably the most brilliant of the three, and certainly had the career with the greatest diversity (or variability). However, the college he founded in Montreal would last only until 1903, when the continued decline in public funding³ and McEachran's continued insistence on very high academic standards, led to fewer and fewer students. Though he arranged for sections to be taught in both English and French (another challenge because of the need for faculty in each language), enrollment continued to fall until McEachran was forced to close.

Nonetheless, a total of 315 students graduated from the college that he established in 1866 and that many considered one of the best, if not the best, contemporary veterinary institutions in North America. Harvard's veterinary college, another superior veterinary program that was affiliated with an elite medical school, had closed two years earlier. The loss of these and other medical school-affiliated veterinary programs in New York City and Washington had a devastating impact on comparative medicine.

In addition to his role as an educator, McEachran enjoyed a multifaceted career. He developed the first animal quarantine system for Canada at a time when transatlantic movement of livestock was increasing and foot-and-mouth disease was present in Britain. In 1876, he was appointed the chief livestock inspector for Canada and set up quarantine stations that later became a model for the US system. Four years earlier, New York City authorities had

invited McEachran to help combat the severe influenza outbreak in horses that had paralyzed the city in what was often referred to as the great equine epizootic of 1872.⁴

By the 1890's, McEachran branched into controlling tuberculosis through tuberculin testing. Twenty years before the practice was accepted, he recommended a system for producing and distributing milk in Montreal. Within the professional organizations for veterinary medicine, he worked with Toronto's Andrew Smith to improve the training of graduate veterinarians, and to reduce the possibility of charlatans plying their trade. His writings and political action were instrumental in creating the Board of Veterinary Surgeons for the Province of Quebec.

In later life, his entrepreneurial spirit led him to financial profit as a stockbreeder, when he helped establish two of the largest ranches in western Canada.

Like so many other events in veterinary history, the closing of programs sometimes denied the profession the full expression and benefit of people's talents and passions. Besides the closure of Harvard's Veterinary College, other seminal events that come to mind include President Roosevelt's dismissal of Daniel Salmon from the Bureau of Animal Industry in 1905, the premature death (1909) in Newfoundland of Pennsylvania's Dean Leonard Pearson, the decision to keep Cornell's veterinary college in Ithaca rather than move with its partner medical school to New York City in the 1920s, the tragic rule of anti-Semitism over rationality in the closure of Middlesex University in the 1940s, and the limited access of women to the profession until the 1970s. The list goes on.

As for McEachran, one can only dream of the impact he could have had on the development of comparative medicine and One Health had his college in Montreal been sustained, or if he had moved to the US and assumed the leadership of one of the veterinary colleges in New York City, or Washington, or the University of Pennsylvania. Or perhaps rejoined his former colleague, William Osler, and established a partner college for veterinary medicine at Johns Hopkins University. Unfortunately, one can only speculate the level at which that continued alliance would have changed the face of our profession.

¹Denis Goulet and Frédéric Jean, "McEachran, Duncan McNab." in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 15, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003. Adapted with some literary license.
http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mceachran_duncan_mcnab_15E.html

² Columbia University's veterinary college in New York City had a similar name.

³ Harvard's veterinary college had the same fate about that time, closing in 1901 after graduating fewer than 200 students. It was the other superior veterinary program at the time that was affiliated with a major medical school.

⁴ The Horse Plague: Fifteen Thousand Horses in this City Unfit for Use." *New York Times*, October 25, 1872.

KEYWORDS:

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One Health
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Faculty of Comparative Medicine
McGill University
Duncan McNab McEachran
Andrew Smith
James Law
William Osler

TOPIC:

One Health

LEADING QUESTION:

What leading 19th Canadian century physician partner with a veterinary college dean?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.